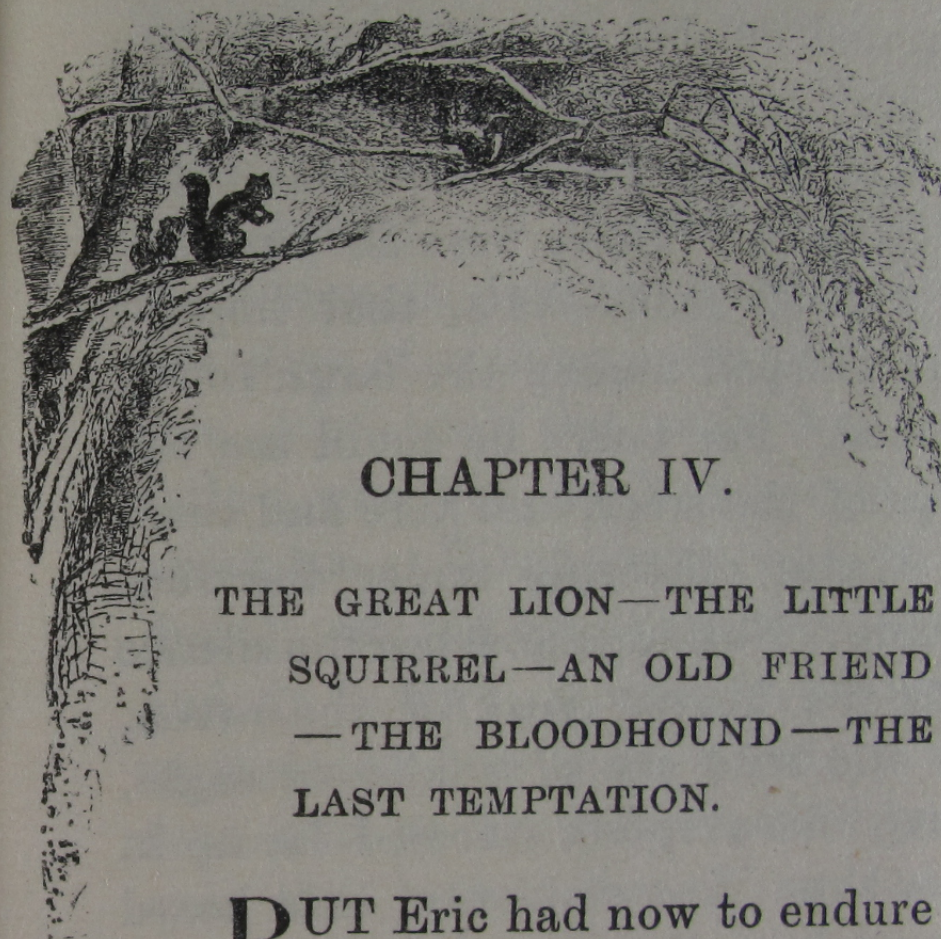


may, I will not let my thread go." And so it was, that when he came so near the stream as to feel the spray upon his cheek, and was sure that he must leap in if he followed his thread, what did he see but a little bridge that passed from bank to bank, and by which he crossed in perfect safety; until at last he began to lose fear, and to believe more and more that he would always be in the right road, so long as he did not trust mere appearances, but kept hold of his thread!



CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT LION—THE LITTLE
SQUIRREL—AN OLD FRIEND
—THE BLOODHOUND—THE
LAST TEMPTATION.

BUT Eric had now to endure a great trial of his faith in the thread. As he journeyed on, it led him up a winding path towards the summit of a hill. The large trees of the for-

est were soon left behind, and small stunted bushes grew among masses of gray rocks. The path was like the bed of a dry brook, and was often very steep. There were no birds except little stone-chats, that hopped and chirped among the large round stones. Far below he could see the tops of the trees, and here and there a stream glittering under the sunbeams. Nothing disturbed the silence but the hoarse croak of the raven, or the wild cry of a kite or eagle, that, like a speck, wheeled far up in the sky. But suddenly, Eric heard a roar like thunder coming from the direction towards which the thread was leading him. He stopped for a moment, but the thread was firm in his hand, and led right up the hill.

On he went, and no wonder he started, when, as he turned the corner of a rock, he heard another roar, and saw the head of a huge lion looking out of what seemed to be a cave, a few yards back from the edge of a dizzy precipice! He saw, too, that the path he must follow was the lion's den and the precipice. What now was to be done? Should he give up his thread and fly? No! A voice in his heart encouraged him to be brave and not fear, and he knew from his experience that he had always been led in safety and peace when he followed the road, holding fast to his thread. He was certain that his father never would deceive him, or bid him do anything but what was right; and

he was sure, too, that the lady, from her love to him, and her teaching him to trust God and to pray, would not have bid him do anything that was wrong. And then an old verse his father taught him came into his mind—

“In the darkest night, my child,
Canst thou see the Right, my child?
Forward then! God is near!
The Right will be light to thee,
Armour and might to thee;
Forward! and never fear!”

So Eric resolved to go on in faith. There was just one thing he saw which cheered him, and that was a white hare, sitting with her ears cocked, quite close to the lion's den, and he wondered how she had no



ERIC AND THE LION.

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The Gold Thread.

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fear, but he could not explain it at the time. On he walked, but he could hardly breathe, as the thread led still nearer and nearer to the den. These big eyes were glaring on him, and seemed to draw him closer and closer! There the lion stood, on one side of the path, while the great precipice descended on the other. One step more, and he was between these two dangers. He moved on until he was so near that he seemed to feel the lion's breath, and then the brute sprang out on him, and tried to strike him with his huge paw that would have crushed him to the dust. Eric shut his eyes, and gave himself up for lost. But the lion suddenly fell back, for he was held fast by a great

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iron chain, and so Eric passed in safety!

Oh, how thankful he was! and how gladly he ran down hill, the lion in his den roaring behind him! Down he ran until all was quiet again. As he pursued his journey in the beautiful green woods, something told him his greatest trial was past. He felt very peaceful and strong. And now, as he reached some noble old beech trees, the thread fell on the grass, and he took this as a sign that he should lie down too, and so he did, grateful for the rest. He ate some of his cake, and drank from a clear spring beside him, and feasted on wild strawberries which grew in abundance all round. He then stretched

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himself on his back among soft moss, and looked up through the branches of the gigantic tree, and saw with delight the sunlight speckling the emerald green leaves and brown bark with touches of silver, and, far up, the deep blue sky with white clouds reposing on it, like snowy islands on a blue ocean; and he watched the squirrels, with their bushy tails, as they ran up the tree, and jumped from branch to branch, and sported among the leaves, until he fell into a sort of pleasant day-dream, and felt so happy, he hardly knew why. As he lay here, he thought he heard, in his half-waking dream, a little squirrel sing a song. Was it not his own heart, now so glad because doing what was right, which was

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singing? This was the song which
he thought he heard:—

“I’m a merry, merry squirrel,
All day I leap and whirl,
Through my home in the old beech-
tree;

If you chase me, I will run
In the shade and in the sun,
But you never, never can catch me!
For round a bough I’ll creep,
Playing hide-and-seek so sly,
Or through the leaves bo-peep,
With my little shining eye.
Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!

“Up and down I run and frisk,
With my bushy tail to whisk
All who mope in the old beech-trees;
How droll to see the owl,
As I make him wink and scowl,

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When his sleepy, sleepy head I tease!

And I waken up the bat,

Who flies off with a scream,

For he thinks that I’m the cat,

Pouncing on him in his dream.

Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!

“Through all the summer long

I never want a song,

From my birds in the old beech-
trees;

I have singers all the night,

And, with the morning bright,

Come my busy humming fat brown
bees,

When I’ve nothing else to do,

With the nursing birds I sit,

And we laugh at the cuckoo

A-cuckooing to her tit!

Ha, ha. ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!

“When winter comes with snow,
And its cruel tempests blow
All the leaves from my old beech-
trees;

Then beside the wren and mouse
I furnish up a house,
Where like a prince I live at my ease!
What care I for hail or sleet,
With my hairy cap and coat;
And my tail across my feet,
Or wrapp'd about my throat!
Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!”

As Eric opened his eyes, and looked
up, he saw a little squirrel with its
tail curling up its back, sitting on a
branch looking down upon him; and
then it playfully ran away with the
tail down and waving after it.

“Farewell, happy little fellow!” said

Eric; “I must do my work now, and
play like you afterwards;” for at
that moment the thread again became
tight, and Eric, refreshed with his
rest, and hearty for his journey,
stepped out bravely. He saw, at
some distance, and beyond an open
glade in the forest, a rapid river
towards which he was descending.
When near the river he perceived
something struggling in the water,
and then heard a loud cry or scream
for help, as if from one drowning.
He was almost tempted to run off to
his assistance without his thread, but
he felt thankful that the thread itself
led in the very direction from whence
he heard the cries coming. So off he
ran as fast as he could, and as he
came to the brink of a deep, dark

pool in the river, he saw the head of a boy rising above the water, as the poor little fellow tried to keep himself afloat. Now he sank—again he rose—until he suddenly disappeared. Eric laid hold of his thread with a firm hand, and leaped in over head and ears, and then rose to the surface, and with his other hand swam to where the boy had sank. He soon caught him, and brought him with great difficulty to the surface, which he never could have done unless the thread had supported them both above the water.

“Eric!” cried the gasping boy, opening his eyes, almost covered by his long, wet hair. “Wolf!” cried Eric, “is it you?” It was indeed poor Wolf, who lay panting on the

dry land, with his rough garments dripping with water, and himself hardly able to move. “Oh, tell me, Wolf, what brought you here! I am so glad to have helped you!” After a little time, when Wolf could speak, he told him in his own way, bit by bit, how Ralph had suspected him; and how the old woman had heard him speaking as she was looking out of an upper window; and how when Ralph asked the gold belt he could not give it; and how he was obliged himself to fly; and how he had been running for his life for hours. “Now let us fly,” said Wolf; “I am quite strong again. I fear that they are in pursuit of us.”

They both went on at a quick pace, Eric having shewn Wolf the wonder-

ful thread, and explained to him how he must never part with it, come what may, and having also given him a bit of his cake to comfort him. "O rub-a-dub, dub!" said Wolf, squeezing the water out of his hair, as he trotted along; "I am glad to be away. Ralph would have killed me like a pig. The voice told me to run after you." So on they went together, happy again to meet. Suddenly Wolf stopped, and listening with anxious face, he said, "Hark! did you hear anything?" "No," said Eric, "what was it?" "Hush!—listen!—there again—I hear it!" "I think I do hear something far off like a dog's bark," replied Eric. "Hark!" So they both stopped and listened, and far away they heard a

deep "Bow-wow-wow-wow-o-o-o-o-o" echoing through the forest. "Let us run as fast as we can," said the boy, in evident fear; "hear him!—hear him!" "Bow-wow-wow-o-o-o-o-o," and the sound came nearer and nearer. "What is it? why are you so afraid?" inquired Eric. "Oh! that is Ralph's bloodhound, Tuscar," cried Wolf, "and he is following us. He won't perhaps touch me, but you he may." So Eric ran as fast as he could, but never let go the gold thread, which this time led towards a steep hill, which they were obliged to scramble up. "Run, Eric!—quick—hide—up a tree—anywhere!" "I cannot, I dare not," said Eric; "whatever happens, I must hold fast my thread." But they heard the

"Bow-wow-o-o-o" coming nearer and nearer, and as they looked back they saw the large hound rush out of the wood, and as he came to the water, catching sight of the boys on the opposite hill, he leaped in, and in a few minutes would be near them. And now he came bellowing like a fierce bull up the hill, his tongue hanging out, and his nose tracking along the ground, as he followed their footsteps. "I shall run and meet him," said Wolf, "and stop him if I can;" and down ran the swineherd, calling, "Tuscar! Tuscar! good dog, Tuscar!" Tuscar knew Wolf, and passed him, but ran up to Eric. As he reached Eric, who stood calm and firm, the bloodhound stopped, panting, smelling his clothes

all round, but, strange to say, wagging his huge tail! He then ran back the way he had come, as if he had made a mistake, and all his race was for nothing? How was this? Ah, poor Tuscar remembered the supper Eric had given him, and was grateful for his kindness!

Wolf was astonished at Eric's escape, until he heard how he and Tuscar had become acquainted; and then Wolf heard the voice in his heart say that there was nothing better than kindness and love shewn to man or beast. They both after this pursued their journey with light and hopeful hearts, for they had got out of what was called the wild robber country, and Eric knew that he was drawing near home. The

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thread was stronger than ever, and every hour it helped more and more to support him. Wolf trotted along with his short stick, and sometimes snorting and blowing with the fatigue like one of his own pigs. They talked as best they could about all they had seen. "Did you see big Thorold the lion?" asked Wolf. "I did," said Eric; "he is very awful, but he was chained." "Lucky for you!" said Wolf, "for Ralph hunts with him and kills travellers. He will obey none but Ralph. I heard him roaring. He is hungry. He once ate one of my pigs, and would have ate me if he had not first caught the poor black porker. I escaped up a tree." And thus they chatted, as they journeyed on through woods,

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and across green plains, and over low hills, until Wolf complained of hunger. Eric at once gave him what remained of his large cake; but it did not suffice to appease the hunger of the herd, who was, however, very thankful for what he got. To their delight they now saw a beautiful cottage not far from their path, and, as they approached it, an old woman, with a pretty girl who seemed to be her daughter, came out to meet them. "Good day, young gentlemen!" said the old woman with a kind smile and a courtesy; "you seem to be on your travels, and look wearied? Pray come into my cottage, and I shall refresh you." "What fortunate fellows we are!" said Wolf. "We are much obliged

to you for your hospitality," replied Eric. But, alas! the thread drew him in an opposite direction; so turning to Wolf, he said, "I cannot go in." "Come, my handsome young gentleman," said the young woman, "and we shall make you so happy. You shall have such a dinner as will delight you, I am sure; and you may remain as long as you please, and I will dance and sing to you; nor need you pay anything." And she came forward smiling and dancing, offering her arm to Eric. "Surely you won't be so rude as refuse me! you are so beautiful, and have such lovely hair and eyes, and I never saw such a belt as you wear: do come!" "Come, my son," said the old woman to Wolf, as she put her hand round his



ERIC AND THE OLD WOMAN.

neck. "With all my heart!" replied Wolf; "for, to tell the truth, I am wearied and hungry; one does not get such offers as yours every day." "I cannot go," again said Eric. *They* could not see the thread, for to some it was invisible; but *he* saw it, and felt it like a wire passing away from the cottage. "Who are you, kind friends?" inquired Eric. "Friends of the king and of his family. Honest subjects, good people," said the old woman. "Do you know Prince Eric?" asked Wolf. "Right well!" replied the young woman. "He is a great friend of mine; a fine, tall, comely youth. He calls me his own little sweetheart." "It is false!" said Eric; "you do not know him. You should not lie."

But he did not tell her who he was, neither did Wolf, for Eric had made a sign to him to be silent. "I won't enter your dwelling," said Eric, "for my duty calls me away." They both gave a loud laugh, and said, "Hear him! Only hear a fine young fellow talking about duty! Pleasure, ease, and liberty are for the young. We only want to make you happy: come!" "I shall go with you," said Wolf; "do come, Eric." "Wolf, speak to me," whispered Eric to the swineherd. "You know *I* cannot go, for my duty tells me to follow the thread. But now I see that this is the house of the wicked, for you heard how they lied; they neither know the king nor his children; and they laugh too at duty. Be advised,

Wolf, and follow me." Wolf hesitated, and looked displeased. "Only for an hour, Eric!" "Not a minute, Wolf. If you trust them more than me, go; but I am sure you and I shall never meet again." "Then I will trust you, Eric," said Wolf; "the voice in my heart tells me to do so." And so they both passed on. But the old woman and the girl began to abuse them, and call them all manner of evil names, and to laugh at them as silly fellows. The girl threw stones at them, which made Wolf turn round and flourish his stick over his head. At last they entered the cottage, the old woman shaking her fist, and calling out from the door, "I'll soon send my friend Ralph after you!" "Oh, ho! is

that the way the wind blows!" exclaimed Wolf, with a whistle; and, grasping Eric's arm, said, "You were right, prince! I never suspected them. I see now they are bad." "I saw that before," replied Eric, "and knew that no good would come to us from making their acquaintance." "Were they not cunning?" "Yes; but, probably, with all their smiles, flattery, and fair promises, they would have proved more cruel in the end than either Ralph or old Thorold." "What would they have done to us? Why did they meet us? Who are they, think you?" "I don't know, Wolf; it was enough for me that they lied and did not wish us to do what was right. The gold thread given me by my father never

could have led me into the society and house of the wicked. I am glad we held it fast.'

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CHAPTER V.

THE GREEN ISLAND
OF THE LAKE,
AND THE RETURN
HOME.

NOT long after this strange adventure, they reached a rising ground, from which a magnificent view burst upon them.

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The Gold Thread.

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Below, there was a large lake, surrounded by wooded hills, above which rose noble rocks fringed with stately pines, and higher ranges of mountains beyond, some of whose summits were covered with snow that glittered like purest alabaster in the azure blue of the sky. Eric gave a cry of joy ; for he saw the house of one of his father's foresters, which he had once visited with his father. "Wolf! Wolf!" he exclaimed, "look yonder, that is the house of Darkeye, the forester. We are safe!" and the thread was leading straight down in the very direction which they wished. Darkeye's house was built on a small green island in the lake. The island was like a little fort, for on every side the rocks

descended like a wall. It could only be approached by a boat, which Darkeye kept on the island, and then by a narrow stair cut out of the rock at the landing-place. No robbers could thus get near it, and Darkeye was there to give shelter to travellers, and to help any of the poor who had to pass that way. The thread led down to the shore. They forgot their fatigue, and ran down till they reached the ferry. "Boat, ahoy!" shouted Eric. By and by two boys were seen running out of the cottage, and after looking cautiously at those who were calling for the boat, they rowed off, and soon were at the shore, where stood Eric with his gold belt, and Wolf in his rough skins. "Olaf! Torquil! don't you remember me?"



ARKEYE'S HOUSE BY THE LAKE.

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asked Eric, looking at his old friends. The boys looked astonished as they recognised the young prince, and received him joyfully into their boat, he holding by the thread, which seemed to cross the ferry towards the cottage. How many questions were mutually put and answered in a few minutes! They told him their father was at home; and how he had lately seen the king; and how the king was anxiously looking for Eric's return; and how glad all on the island would be to see him; and the younger boy, Torquil, told him how they had now a tame otter, that fished in the lake, and a fine golden eagle which they had got young in her nest, that also lived on the island with them; and how their mother

had got another baby since he had been there, and how happy they all were, and so on, until they arrived at the island, and there was old Darkeye himself waiting to receive them; and when he saw who was in the boat, he ran down the stone steps and grasped the young prince's hand, and drew him to his heart. "Welcome! welcome!" said he; "I knew you had been in the forest, but your father would not tell me anything more about you. He only said that he longed for your coming home. But who is this?" asked Darkeye, pointing to Wolf. "A friend of mine," said Eric, with a smile. "My name is Wolf," grunted the swineherd. "I think I have seen him before. But no! What? Yes!"

said Darkeye, examining him; then added, as if he had discovered some old acquaintance, "Surely I *have* seen him. Tell me, my fine fellow, did you"—— It was evident Darkeye had seen Wolf killing his game, or in some affray with the robbers. Wolf looked sternly at Darkeye, then at Eric, but said nothing. "Oh, Darkeye, do not trouble poor Wolf," said Eric, "but let him go into the cottage; and come you with me, as I wish to tell you all that has happened to me during these few days." So, while the boys took Wolf to the cottage, and food was being prepared, Eric told Darkeye all his adventures; and you would have been sure that the forester was hearing something which

surprised and interested him wonderfully, had you seen his face, and how he sometimes laughed, or knit his brows and looked angry, or sad and solemn, or sprung to his feet from the rock on which he was sitting beside Eric. When Eric came to speak about the old woman and her daughter. "Ah!" said Darkeye, "there are not worse people in that wicked country! They say that the old woman is a witch of some kind. But whether she poisons travellers or drowns them, I know not. No doubt she is in league with Ralph the robber, and would have robbed you or kept you fast in some way or other till you were handed over to him. You were right, my prince, in all you did. The only way of being delivered

from temptation is to be brave, and do what is right, come what may." Then, grasping Eric by the hand, he led him back to the cottage. There Darkeye's wife received him like a mother, and all the children gathered round him in surprise and admiration, he looked so brave and lovely.

One of the walls of the cottage was reared on the edge of the rock, so that it seemed a continuation of it, and to rise up from the deep waters of the lake. The boys were thus able often to fish with a long line out of the window. A winding-stair led to a look-out on the roof, from which the whole island, called "The Green Island of the Lake," could be seen. It was about a mile or more in circumference, and was dotted all over

with the cottages of the other foresters and king's huntsmen, each surrounded with clumps of trees, through which the curling smoke from the chimneys might be seen ascending. There were everywhere beautifully-kept gardens, with fruits, and flowers, and bee-hives; and fields, too, with their crops. On the green knolls and in the little valleys might be seen cows and sheep; while flocks of goats browsed among ivy-coloured rocks. In the middle of the island was a little shallow lake, beside which the otter had his house among the rocks; and there the eagle also lived. All the children in the island were the best of friends, and they played together, and sailed their boats on the little lake, and every day met in

the house of one of the foresters to learn their lessons; and on Sunday, as they were very far away from any church, old Darkeye used to read the Good Book to them, and worship with them, and did all he could to make them love God and one another. There was also in the island a house, where, by the king's orders, all poor travellers could find refuge and refreshment. And it was a great pleasure to the boys and girls to visit them; and if they were sick and confined to bed, to attend to their wants. If the stranger had any children, the young islanders always shared their sports with them. And nothing pleased these stranger children more than to get leave to sail a boat, or to have the loan of a

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fishing-rod, or to hear the boys call Oscar, for that was the name of the otter, out of his den, and to play with Tor the eagle; or to see them feed Oscar with some of the fish they had caught, and Tor with a bit of meat. The dogs were so friendly, too, that they never touched Oscar, but would swim about in the same pool with him. And so all were happy in the Green Island; because Darkeye had taught them what a wicked thing selfishness was, and that the only way to be happy was by thinking about others as well as themselves, and by becoming like Him, the Elder Brother of us all, who "pleased not Himself." He also used to say: "Now, when you work, work like men, and when you

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play, play like boys: be hearty at both." And so, while there was no idleness, there was abundance of recreation. Another evil was never permitted on the island, and that was, disobedience to parents, or want of respect to the old. But, indeed, punishment for these offences was seldom needed. The young learned to *like* to do what was right, and were too brave and manly to give pain and trouble to others, by forcing them to find fault or to punish. I should have mentioned, also, that they had a little band of musicians. One beat the drum, a few played the fife, and others some simple instrument; while almost all could sing tolerably well in parts. Thus, many a traveller would pause and listen

with delight, as he heard, on a summer's evening, the chorus sung from many voices, or the music from the band coming from the island. "Young people," Darkeye used to say, "have much wealth and happiness given them, for themselves and others, if they only use their gifts."

But I am forgetting Eric and Wolf. They were both, you may be sure, ready for their dinner, and there was laid for them on a table, cream, cakes, and fresh trout, and such other good things as the kind woman could get ready.

But now the thread began to move, as if it wished Eric to move also. Before rising to depart, he told Wolf how Darkeye, for his sake, would be so glad to take care of him, until he

got his father's permission to bring him into the castle; that he would learn to be a huntsman, and be taught what was good, and to know about the Voice that spoke in his heart; and that all the boys in the island would make him their friend if he did what was right. "Ralph will come here!" said Wolf, hanging his head. "I wish the rascal did," said Darkeye, "for he would never go back. But he cannot enter my fort, and knows me and my huntsmen too well ever to try it. I have had more than one brush with the villain, and we hope soon to drive him and his brood from their bloody nest. Wolf, you are welcome and safe, for Eric's sake!" Then turning to Eric, he said, "I shall teach him, and make a

man of him, my young prince, depend upon it. And now, before we part, I have to ask a favour," continued Darkeye. "You know our custom near evening? If the thread permits, remain and be one of us." "I remember it," said Eric, "and will remain and be one of you, and let poor Wolf also be one." And so they entered the cottage, and all sat down round an open window which looked out upon the beautiful lake with its wooded islands, and surrounded by the noble forest, above which rose the giant peaks and precipices. The water was calm as glass, and reflected every brilliant colour from rock and tree, and, most of all, from the golden clouds, which already began to gather in the west. Dark-

eye read from the Good Book of one who had left his father's house, and went to a far country, where he would have satisfied his hunger from the husks which the swine did eat, and could not, but who at last returned home after having suffered from his disobedience. When he closed the book, all stood up and sung these words with sweet and happy voices:—

"Father! from Thy throne above,
Bless our lowly home below!
Jesus, Shepherd! in thy love,
Guard Thy flock from every foe.

"Thine we are! for Thou hast made
us;
Thine, for we're redeem'd by
Thee;

Thine, for Thou hast ever led us,
Thine, we evermore shall be!

"May we love Thee, may we fear
Thee,

May Thy will, not ours, be done,
Never leave us till we're near Thee
In the Home where all are one!"

Then they knelt down, and Darkeye spoke to God in name of them all, thanking Him for His goodness, and telling Him their wants. When they rose from their knees, the gold thread shone brilliantly, and, like a beam of light, passed out at the door in the direction of the ferry. During the singing of the verses, Wolf seemed for the first time quite overcome. He bent his head, and covered his face with his hands. He then said, in a

low voice, when the short service was over, and as if speaking to himself, while all were silent and listening to him, "I had a dream. Long, long ago. A carriage—a lady. She was on her knees, with her hands clasped, and speaking to the sky. She had hold of me. Ralph was there and the robbers. I forget the rest." He rose and looked out of the window, gazing vacantly. "What can he mean?" asked Eric aside to Darkeye, who was looking tenderly on Wolf. "Ah! who knows, poor boy! Singing always touches the heart of these wanderers. Perhaps—yes—it may be," he said, so that Eric alone could hear him, "that he has been taken when a child by Ralph from some rich traveller, and perhaps his mother

was killed! He may have been the child of good people. Was that person his mother who, he says, prayed for him? If so, her prayers are now answered, for her boy will be delivered,—poor Wolf! Wolf, my boy,” said Darkeye, “come and bid farewell to your friend.” Wolf started as from a dream, and came to Eric. “Farewell, my kind Wolf, and I hope to see you some day in my father’s house.” The herd spoke not a word, but wiped his eyes with the back of his rough hand. “Cheer up, Wolf, for you will be good and happy here.” “Wolf is happy already, and he will take care of the pigs, or do anything for you all.” He then held out his stick to Eric, and said, “Take it; keep it for my

sake; it is all Wolf has to give; Ralph has the gold coin.” “Thank you, good Wolf; but you will require it, and I need nothing to remember you.” “Don’t be angry, Eric, for what I did to you in the forest when we first met. My heart is sorry.” “We did not know one another then, Wolf, and I shall never forget that it is to you I owe my escape.” “Wolf loves you, and every one here.” “I am sure you do, Wolf, and I love you. God bless you, Wolf, I must go; farewell!” And thus they parted. But all gathered round Eric, and accompanied him to the boat, blessing the little prince, and wishing him a peaceful and happy journey. Eric thanked them with many smiles and tender words.

Darkeye alone went with him into the boat, wondering greatly at the thread, and most of all at the prince, who shone with a beauty that seemed not of this world. The prince landed, but Darkeye knew, for many reasons, that he could not accompany him in his journey, which he must take alone. Eric embraced Darkeye, and waving his hand to all on the island, he was soon lost to their sight in the great forest.

A winding pathway, over the ridge of hills, led down to a broad and rapid but smooth river, and on its banks was a royal boat, splendid and rich to look upon. She was white as snow, with a purple seat at the end covered by a canopy, that gleamed with golden tassels and many gems.

The thread led into the boat, and though no one was there, Eric entered, and sat on a purple cushion, on which the Gold Thread also laid itself down. No sooner had he gone on board of the boat, than—as if his little foot, when it touched her, had sent her from the shore—she slowly moved into the centre of the channel, and was carried downwards by the current. On she swept on the bosom of that clear stream, between shores adorned with all that could delight the eye—rocks and trees and flowers, with here and there foaming waterfalls, from mountain rivulets which poured themselves into the great river. The woods were full of song, and birds with splendid plumage flashed amidst the foliage like

rainbow hues amidst the clouds. Eric knew not whither he was being carried, but his heart was sunshine and peace. On and on he swept with the winding stream, until at last, darting under a dark archway of rock, and then emerging into the light, the boat grounded on a shore of pure white sand, while the thread rose and led him to the land. No sooner had he stepped on shore and ascended the green bank, than he found himself at the end of a long broad avenue of splendid old trees, whose tops met overhead. The far-off end of the avenue was closed by a great marble staircase, which ascended to a magnificent castle. Wall rose above wall, and tower over tower. He saw grand flights of stairs, leading from one



ERIC'S FATHER'S CASTLE.

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The Gold Thread.

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stately terrace to another, with marble statues, clear gushing fountains, and flower-gardens, and every kind of lovely tree. It was his father's castle at last! He ran on with breathless anxiety and joy. He soon reached a large gate, that seemed to be covered with glittering gold. As he looked at it, he saw the thread tied to a golden knocker upon it, shaped like the old cross in the forest. Inscribed over the gate were the words, "He that persevereth to the end shall be saved." He seized the knocker, and the moment it fell, the thread broke and vanished like a flash of light. A crash of music was then heard. The door opened, and there, in the midst of a court paved with marble of the purest white, and

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The Gold Thread.

on a golden throne, sat Eric's father,
surrounded by his brothers and
sisters. The beautiful lady was
there too, and many, many more to
welcome Eric. His father clasped
him to his heart, and said, "My son
was lost, but is found!" While all
crowded round Eric to bid him wel-
come, with his weary feet and torn
dress, kept together by the golden
band, a chorus was heard singing,—

"Home where the weary rest,
Home where the good are blest.
Home of the soul;
Glorious the race when run,
Glorious the prize when won,
Glorious the goal?"

Then there rose a swell of many
young voices singing,—

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The Gold Thread.

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"Oh, be joyful, be joyful, let every
voice sing!

Welcome, brothers, our brother,
the son of the king;

His wanderings are past, to his
father he's come;

Little Eric, our darling, we welcome
thee home!

"Oh, bless'd is the true one who
follows the road,

Holding fast to his GOLD THREAD
OF DUTY TO GOD,

Who, when tempted, is firm, who
in danger is brave,

Who, forgetting himself, will a lost
brother save.

Then be joyful, be joyful, for Eric
is come,

Little Eric, our darling, we welcome
thee home!"

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The Gold Thread.

And then the sun set, and the earth
was dark, but the palace of the king
shone like an aurora in the wintry
sky.



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